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REPORT

of

COMMITTEE ON THE STUDY OF CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS OF GENERAL INTERDENOMINATIONAL AGENCIES

to the

AGENCIES WHICH PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY CONFERENCE

Held in Atlantic City, N. J.
December 9-11, 1941

Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America
International Council of Religious Education
Home Missions Council of North America
Foreign Missions Conference of North America
Council of Church Boards of Education
National Council of Church Women
United Stewardship Council
Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada

TO –

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Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada

THE Committee on the Study of Closer Relationships of General Interdenominational Agencies, constituted by official action of the above named agencies, herewith submits a report of its study of these agencies and of the Conference which it was directed to convene and to conduct, together with the recommendations presented for consideration and action by each agency.

I. Origin of Study

During 1940 a committee representing the International Council of Religious Education, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, the Home Missions Council, the Council of Women for Home Missions, the National Council of Church Women and the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America carried on a preliminary study of the possibility of closer relations among general inter-church agencies.

This committee reported to the agencies represented in it that it had "reached the clear conviction that the desperate need of the modern world calls for a new effort to order the churches' forces in the most effective way for the reinforcing of each by the strength of all; for united plans for the strongest possible impact of the agencies of the churches on the totality of Christian problems and concerns; and for such closer relationships as will make these objectives possible."

The committee's study revealed three possible types of closer relationships, viz.:

1. Development of cooperative activities within the present organizational structure.

2. A federation of agencies without surrender of separate identities.

3. The organization of a single corporate body replacing the present agencies.

The committee presented to the agencies recommendations designed to make possible the study of these plans by a larger and more representative conference. These recommendations, in the form in which they were subsequently approved by the several agencies, provided —

first, for the appointment of a representative Committee, consisting of three persons appointed by each participating agency with the Executive Secretary of each agency ex officio, to make further preliminary studies and to arrange for and conduct a representative conference;

second, that this conference, to be held during 1941, consist of 20 (later increased to 25) officially appointed representatives of each participating agency; and

third, that attention in this study be particularly directed toward the possibility of a single corporate agency.

These recommendations were adopted and participation in the proposed study and conference was approved by all of the agencies represented in the preliminary committee and by three additional agencies—the Council of Church Boards of Education, the Missionary Education Movement of the U. S. and Canada, and the United Stewardship Council. The list of participating agencies (the Home Missions Council and the Council of Women for Home Missions having in the meantime merged) is, therefore, as given above.

II. Procedure of Committee

The Committee was convened on April 18th and organized by electing Luther A. Weigle as Chairman and H. N. Morse as Secretary.

1. The Committee requested its Secretary to make the preliminary studies and to assemble the documents and general information concerning the several agencies required for the work of the Committee and for the consideration of the Study Conference. This

was done through correspondence and conference with the representatives of these agencies. This study had these limited objectives:

a) To make a factual analysis of the cooperating agencies, with the emphasis on those factors most obviously related to the question of 'closer relationships,' viz.: constituency and management, organization and operating procedure, primary functions and program, inter-organizational relations, finance and promotion;

b) To consider the case for a single corporate agency and to formulate principles for its organization and operation;

c) To consider the practicability and the advantages or disadvantages of other types of 'closer relationships' than such a single corporate agency.

2. A preliminary report of this study was considered by the Committee at a meeting on September 26th and was approved with certain changes and additions. The Chairman and Secretary were authorized to prepare the report in final form for submission to the Study Conference as the report of the Committee.

3. The final report, in mimeographed form, was submitted, in advance of the Study Conference, to the officially appointed delegates of the various agencies as the basic document for the consideration of the Conference. A brief summary of this report is included herewith and an official copy of the full report is, at the same time, being submitted to each agency.

4. The Committee called the Study Conference to convene at the Hotel Dennis, Atlantic City, N. J., December 9 to 11, to consist of 25 persons appointed by each agency together with six persons appointed by the Association of Council Secretaries. The Committee prepared the agenda and suggested basis of procedure for the Conference and served as its Findings Committee.

III. The Study Conference

1. The Conference convened at 2 p.m., Tuesday, December 9th, adjourning at noon on Thursday, the 11th. There were 169 registered delegates in attendance. A copy of the official roster of delegates is being furnished each agency.

2. The Conference organized by electing Luther A. Weigle as Chairman, H. N. Morse as Executive Secretary and Gilbert Q. LeSourd as Recording Secretary.

3. The general procedure of the Conference was substantially as follows:

a) *Tuesday afternoon session* — following the opening devotional service and the organization of the Conference, the report of the Committee was presented and discussed as to facts.

b) *Tuesday evening session* — the proposals presented by the Committee were discussed in plenary session and the advantages and disadvantages of each considered.

c) *Wednesday morning session* — following the devotional service, brief statements were made and discussed in plenary session, concerning various present or possible forms of inter-council cooperation.

d) *Wednesday afternoon session* — the morning discussion was continued in plenary session until 4 o'clock, a motion being presented at the conclusion of this session for the approval in principle of one of the proposals presented. Thereafter, the several council delegations held brief separate meetings.

e) *Wednesday evening session* — a brief report was presented by each separate council delegation to a plenary session. Thereupon the Conference voted, with practical unanimity, to adopt the motion made at the afternoon session.

f) *Thursday morning session* — the Committee, acting as a Findings Committee, presented to a plenary session certain recommendations as to further procedure which were adopted.

Preparation and release of a summary statement concerning the Conference and of a statement addressed to the constituencies of the councils concerning the task of the Church in the present situation were authorized. Copy of these statements is being submitted to each agency. Following a general discussion and the closing devotional service the Conference adjourned.

4. It was explicitly understood that the function of the Conference and the purpose of its recommendations were to advance the cause of cooperation among the denominations through the agencies represented. The Conference did not consider any questions of church unity, as such.

IV. Summary of Proposals Formulated by the Committee

1. As a result of its study the Committee reached the same conclusion which had been voiced by the preliminary committee as to the importance of effecting the closest possible relationships among these agencies. The Committee reported its judgment that a full consideration of all the facts would reveal —

That the lack of an adequately integrated and coordinated strategy of church work is a limiting and weakening factor in very many areas of the church's service;

That, similarly, the influence of the church in the broad realm of public attitudes on issues of vital concern to the church is made less decisive and effective;

That existing interdenominational organizations on every level are limited in their effectiveness, *first,* because they represent only a part of the churches, *second,* because they represent only a part of the interests of the churches included in their constituency, *third,* because in different degrees they are all inadequately supported, *fourth,* because their inter-relations are such that each is not sufficiently reinforced by the strength of all;

That, in spite of all limitations, the cooperative movement as a whole is a striking demonstration of the growing unity of the church and of the great actual and potential value of united effort.

The Committee based its argument for closer relationships on four considerations:

as an essential step in creating an integrated cooperative movement for the service of the churches;

as a recognition of the essential interrelatedness of the functions and interests of these agencies;

as a practical measure for increased efficiency in operation;

as a dramatic and convincing demonstration of the churches' desire for united action in this time of crisis.

2. The Committee presented for the consideration of the Conference four alternative proposals:

Proposal A — An expanded program of inter-council cooperation within the present organizational structure;

PROPOSAL B — The creation of a supplementary intercouncil service agency, to represent the councils in matters of common interest;

PROPOSAL C — The creation of a single corporate agency to succeed all of the existing councils and to continue and extend all of their interests and functions;

PROPOSAL D — The creation of a corporate agency to succeed those agencies primarily serving the churches in the United States.

3. With reference to each of these proposals the Committee presented an outline of organization and procedure which was intended to be *merely illustrative*. The apparent advantages and disadvantages of each proposal were stated. No actual blue print of organization was prepared and approval was not sought of any particular details.

V. Recommendations Now Presented for Consideration and Action

After a thorough and constructive discussion, remarkable for the frankness with which the Conference faced the problems before it and for the complete unity of spirit and purpose manifested, the following recommendations *were adopted* for consideration and action by the agencies represented:

1. *As to general objectives*

First, that we approve in principle the creation of a more inclusive cooperative organization which will provide for the continued, expanded, and more effective coordination and integration of our respective Councils, such as is indicated in Plan "C" of the study document and as it may be modified by further study.

Second, that we recommend the continued study of the constitution and program of such an organization and its relation to the denominations, to the existing councils and to the state and local Councils.

Third, that we recommend that the Councils proceed at once to the necessary steps for further cooperation through the organization of such joint Service Departments as may be found feasible.

Fourth, that we recommend that a special Committee be set up by the Councils to carry forward these recommendations.

2. *As to procedure*

First, that the special Committee called for in the foregoing resolution consist of four persons to be designated by each agency with the Executive Secretary of each agency, and that it include four representatives of the Association of Council Secretaries designated by that Association.

Second, that each agency be requested to designate its representatives on this Committee prior to March 1, 1942, and that the first meeting of the Committee be called early in March.

Third, that the Chairman and Secretary of the present Study Committee be the convenors of the new Committee.

Fourth, that this Committee report to the Councils by not later than December 1, 1942.

Fifth, that the materials assembled by the Study Committee on the organization and work of the Councils, together with the reports presented to the Conference from the separate meetings of the Council delegations and the suggestions made in the discussions in the plenary sessions of the Conference be referred to the new Committee when constituted.

The Conference further voted that the Chairman and Secretary of the Study Committee be authorized to prepare the report to be submitted to the agencies represented for their consideration and action, and that the expenses involved in the study made by the Committee, including the expense of printing the report to be presented to the Councils, be pro rated among the Councils according to their respective budgets.

Respectfully submitted,

LUTHER A. WEIGLE, *Chairman*
HERMANN N. MORSE, *Secretary*

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL C

I. This proposal contemplates the creation of a single corporate agency to continue and extend all of the present general agencies included in this study and to combine all of their interests and functions. Such an organization would be conceived of as a comprehensive manifestation of the cooperative spirit of American Protestantism and as a central link in an integrated ecumenical program. It would have organic relationships with the churches as such; with their functional and administrative agencies for missions, Christian Education and related causes; with cooperative organizations in local communities, states, provinces or regions of the United States and Canada; with cooperative organizations in other lands; and with any international or world-wide cooperative organizations.

II. Basis of Organization

1. The name of this agency might be "Council of the Churches of Christ in North America."

2. This Council should be incorporated under a new charter to be secured.

3. The objects of the Council should be stated –

a) In *general* terms – as to manifest the essential unity of the cooperating churches in spirit and purpose for the furtherance of their common mission in the world;

b) In terms of *specific functions* – as to advance the objects and purposes and to carry on the work of these interdenominational agencies which agree to enter into this plan, together with such additional objects and purposes as may, from time to time, be agreed to by the cooperating churches;

c) In terms of *ecumenical relationships* – as to constitute the North American unit in an integrated organization of cooperative Protestantism.

4. Classes of membership in the council would include –

a) *Complete membership,* i.e. adherence to the Council *as a whole* will be by action of the cooperating denominations as such, with such concurrent action, in each case, by functional agencies and other denominational units as may be possible or desirable.

b) *Partial or limited membership:* those denominations which are

not prepared to accept complete membership will be urged to identify themselves with particular divisions, departments or functions of the Council. This may be either by action of the denomination as such, or by action of an individual board or functional agency of the denomination.

c) *Membership of territorial or local interdenominational organizations:* provision should be made for organic relationship to the Council of territorial or local organizations which are constituted by the official action of denominational bodies within their respective areas of operation and which, in their organization and objects, conform to such standards as the Council shall set.

d) *Organizational membership:* provision should be made for adherence to the Council of other general organizations having related interests and responsibilities and which operate in cooperation with the denominations constituting the Council.

III. Constitution of Central Plenary Body

1. There should be a central plenary body or Council. Denominations accepting complete membership should have representation graduated according to their communicant church memberships and their annual expenditures through boards and functional agencies.

2. Representation should also be accorded —

a) Denominations accepting partial membership in the Council, if they desire such representation;

b) State and local interdenominational agencies;

c) Other organizations adhering to the Council.

3. Definite provision should be made for inclusion of members-at-large; of both men and women; of both professional and lay representatives; of both board and general church representatives; of representatives of special racial and occupational groups and of all regions.

IV. Functions of Central Plenary Body

1. The constitution should explicitly provide that the plenary body of the Council has no administrative control over the constituent denominations as such or over their respective boards and agencies.

2. The principal functions of the plenary body, to be carried out by it directly, or through some ad interim body, as Executive Committee, of its own creation, or through staff representatives, should include the following:

a) The general oversight, review and coordination of the whole field of work of the Council;

b) All actions in which the constituent churches in their plenary capacity are acting through the Council;

c) Actions and basic studies concerning the relations of churches as churches with one another;

d) The making of representative utterances as the "voice" of all the churches;

e) The relations of the Council to still larger cooperative bodies (as the World Council of Churches); a special section should be created, composed of official representatives of denominations adhering to the World Council of Churches, as the North American Section of that Council;

f) Relations of the Council to government and to the general North American public.

3. The various 'service' agencies of the Council shall be under the direct administration and control of the plenary body.

V. Executive Committee

An Executive Committee should be created by the plenary body representative of all the elements included in it, and should have its full powers ad interim.

The Executive Committee should be authorized to create a small Administrative Committee with assigned and limited ad interim administrative responsibilities; also such other standing or special committees as may be necessary or convenient for the discharge of its responsibilities.

VI. Operating Divisions

1. The basic work of the Council, other than that committed to the plenary body itself, shall be conducted through Operating Divisions, the distinctions between which are broadly functional. While each of these Divisions will have the primary responsibility to develop the basic philosophy and the requisite programs and procedures within its assigned field, it should be understood that there will be a large degree of inter-divisional cooperation and exchange of ideas and that in various particulars, as in the approach to special constituency groups, definite channels of inter-divisional joint activity will be provided. All of the divisions will utilize the various Service Departments of the Council.

2. The basis on which the Operating Divisions shall be set up needs careful study. The following were suggested:

Division of Worship, Evangelism and Stewardship
Division of Christian Education
Division of Social Education and Action
Division of Institutions of Higher Education
Division of Foreign Missions
Division of Home Missions

3. The characteristics of the Operating Divisions would be –

a) Each Division will be authorized to establish and maintain direct relations with the denominational boards and agencies corresponding to its field of operation, including those of denominations not included in the constituent membership of the Council, and with other organizations carrying similar interests.

b) Each Division will have related to it, for the general direction of its work, a representative commission constituted, primarily, of official representatives of its corresponding denominational agencies.

c) Within the limitations of the constitution of the Council and of such general actions as may be taken by the plenary body, each Division with its corresponding Commission will have substantial autonomy. This autonomy will be in relation to the following general understandings:

(1) No actions will be taken which impinge upon functions committed to the plenary body itself without specific authorization;

(2) Financial commitments will be subject to authorization by the Executive Committee;

(3) The work of each Division will be subject to review by the Staff of the Council as a whole and by the Council itself.

d) The Commission of each Division may create such departments within the Division and such special departmental or other committees as it may deem necessary or desirable.

e) The Commission of each Division may establish such professional advisory sections as it may deem desirable and may determine their membership and methods of operation.

f) Each Division will be expected to cooperate with the Department of General Promotion in furthering the total interests of the Council and, specifically, in securing the funds necessary for its own work. However, no Division shall be required to underwrite or become wholly responsible for its own budget.

g) In general, effort should be made to secure a full measure of participation in the work of each Division on the part of lay representatives, both men and women, and of young people.

VII. Service Departments

1. For the service of the Council as a whole, of the various Operating Divisions, and of the various sub-national cooperative organizations and the denominational agencies constituent to the Council, Service Departments shall be established and maintained under the direction of the Executive Committee of the Council.

2. Such Departments might include any or all of the following:

Department of Field Service
Department of Research and Field Survey
Department of Missionary Education
Department of Publication
Department of Financial Promotion
Department of Mercy and Relief
Department of Religious Radio
Woman's Department
Young People's Department
Department of Public Relations
Treasurer's Office

3. Each such Department shall have a Committee or Commission related to it.

4. If other functions of the plenary body of the Council require specialized staff attention, special departments or commissions may be established to care for them. Such might be –

Study of Church Unity;
Relations with Churches Abroad;
International Relations and World Peace.

VIII. Staff Organization

1. *Executive Personnel*

a) The Council will have a General Secretary, charged with responsibility for the oversight, direction and coordination of the work of the Council as a whole.

b) Heads of Operating Divisions will have the title of Executive Secretary, heads of Departments the title of Secretary, except that the head of the Treasury shall be known as Treasurer.

c) Assistants to the General Secretary, the Executive Secretaries, Secretaries and Treasurer may be appointed as required.

2. *Staff Council*

There shall be a Staff Council composed of all members of the Executive Staff, under the chairmanship of the General Secretary. This will have frequent and regular meetings and will be charged to review the programs of the several Divisions and Departments and to consider necessary adjustments and common procedures. Since the Council should regard itself not as a loose federation of autonomous units but as a well integrated and thoroughly unified agency, the Staff Council may actually perform a very important function in developing common points of view so that the entire program may be the result of group thinking.

3. *National Staff*

There shall be a National Staff, meeting annually, composed of the members of the Staff Council and the executives of all affiliated agencies in regions, states and communities. Its functions will be, broadly, in the field of general policies and relationships from the point of view of developing a unified ecumenical movement.

IX. General Considerations

1. It should be noted, first, that the significance of this proposal is in relation to its general outline rather than to any specific organizational detail. Its essential features are —

A comprehensive, unified program;
A representative plenary body;
Operating Divisions on broad, functional lines;
Technically competent Service Departments;
An integrated staff organization;
Organic relations with cooperative organizations on other levels;
A method of relating to the total program all special groups.

2. It should be noted, further, that all the facilities of the Council will have in view the service of cooperative agencies on other levels as well as the needs of the Council itself; and that these other agencies will have in view the advancement of the major objectives of the Council, since they will be an integral part of the Council organization.